

A PROJECT FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT IN A TRANSITIONAL CUBA

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“Enseñar puede cualquiera; educar, tan solo quien sea un evangelio vivo.”

—Don José de la Luz y Caballero.

Education is one of the most important infrastructure investments any nation can make. And, on this count, Cuba has always been among the leaders in Latin America. For example, in the half century elapsed between 1899 and 1953, adult literacy rate went up from 10 to 73 percent—one of the highest in Latin America, at its time—public secondary schools (institutes) increased from 6 to 21, and scores of private ones appeared throughout the island (Cuban Censuses, 1899 and 1953).

The university system in Cuba also grew very rapidly. It was founded in Havana in 1728 as Seminario de San Carlos, later becoming the University of Havana (U.H.). By 1956, it had three public, autonomous, institutions at Havana (U.H.), Santa Clara (Central) and Santiago (Oriente). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, several smaller and private universities were created, the most important being Santo Tomás de Villanueva, in Havana.

The present Cuban dictatorial regime, organized in the wake of the 1959 revolution, has also done much in education, during its nearly forty years in power. For example, literacy rate went up to over 95 percent after intensive government campaigns, during its first five years—but other countries such as Costa Rica have also achieved similar literacy levels without such high political costs (Romeu, 1995) and without literacy handbooks doubling up as propaganda and in-

doctrination material, that helped consolidate the new system. Finally, all levels of education became free, highly politicized and widely available—especially in the countryside and remote villages, where they had traditionally been neglected—after all private and religious schools were taken over by the government in 1961.

After 1959, universities also became highly politicized and lost their traditional autonomy. Among other major changes, several new universities were created in the provinces; the U.H. was divided into one smaller university and several specialized institutes (e.g. Pedagógico E. J. Varona, Polytechnic J. A. Echevarría, de Ciencias Médicas, Ciencias Agropecuarias, etc.) and the Ministry of Higher Education was created to control and supervise them. Finally, and most important, the selection of students and professors (and their expulsion when necessary) as well as that of texts and curriculum, became based on political considerations. In short, the entire (higher) education system became part of the machinery that consolidated and kept the regime in power, acquiring the dual function of educating as well as indoctrinating its students.

However, many excellent students and professors endured this governmental and political pressure. And much good teaching and research has occurred, in spite of this. It is necessary not to throw away the baby with the bath water, once the inevitable process of transition to pluralism starts. At the risk of starting some controversy, we need to separate the good from the bad—save the good and foster more of it. Much

is solid and should stay, for education is one of the two main achievements of Cuba's 40 years of dictatorial regime. In addition, public education will be one of the main pillars to get the country back on the road to recovery.

OBJECTIVE AND ORGANIZATION

The objective of the present paper is: (1) to take a serious look at ways to provide much needed faculty development aid to Cuban higher education, in the forthcoming post-Castro era; and (2) to propose a project to undertake this effort. Our work is based on our experiences as students and professionals in the Cuban higher education system, as students and faculty in U.S. and several Iberoamerican universities, and as developers and coordinators of faculty development projects in the United States, Latin America and Spain.

Everything stated and proposed in this paper intends to improve and redress the current state of higher education in Cuba, and in particular in the University of Havana, our beloved Alma Mater. At the outset, we recognize the need for all Cubans, inside and in exile, to work together on this project. Unfortunately, at this time, those inside the island are not in a position to actively contribute to this project, which requires immediate attention. Therefore, the pressing need to start thinking and planning about these problems forces us to start without them—but with the certainty that they will become an intrinsic part of it as soon as it is possible. Finally, this is neither a partisan nor political proposal.

This paper is organized as follows. To obtain a better grasp of the problem, we first compare the features of the present *versus* the previous higher education organization in Cuba; then we discuss the student and faculty development needs during the transition. This is followed by an overview of some of our past efforts working in faculty development projects and discuss ways of adapting them to the forthcoming Cuban transition. Finally, we propose and discuss in detail a project for faculty development in Cuba, during and after the transition, to develop a sounder higher education system where students (1) are taught without political discrimination and (2) can

grow, not only technically, but also intellectually and humanly.

CUBAN UNIVERSITIES BEFORE AND AFTER 1960

There are qualitative as well as quantitative differences between education in Cuba before and after the rise to power of the present regime. Qualitative, because before 1959, education was considered a tool for the improvement of the individual, and after 1959 it acquired an additional political function. Quantitative, because before 1959, Cuban public education had a relatively small budget, provided by a poorly organized and endowed state and had to compete with private schools. And after 1959, public education (the only one left) received substantially larger resources provided by a rich, strong and well organized government that had taken over the entire economic private sector.

In broad terms, before 1959 the Cuban university system consisted of three public, autonomous universities that were nearly tuition free and (at least on paper) open to all citizens independent of religion, race, social or economic class or place of residence. These university centers were ideologically and politically pluralistic, specialized and emphasized humanistic careers such as philosophy, law, education and social sciences, but still maintained high quality and internationally recognized faculty and programs in medicine, sciences and engineering.

In addition the Cuban university, as an institution, fulfilled a second, very important function: to provide leadership in the political life of the nation. It was literally the cradle of ideas and national leaders. The revolutions of 1933 and 1959 came out of university ranks. And most of our political, social and economic ideas were first conceived by university faculty and students. Just to name a few top national figures, Enrique José Varona, Ramón Grau San Martín, Eduardo Chibás, Carlos Prío Socarrás and also Fidel Castro, were all faculty or student leaders.

After 1959, the number of universities, technical institutes and research centers increased by an order of magnitude, as did the number of university students (1953 and 1981 Cuban Censuses). The new univer-

sity also became primarily technically oriented, providing large resources for the engineering and science curriculums. In turn, access to the largely diminished humanistic careers (law, journalism, philosophy) was now based on ideology and tightly controlled. For example, Catholic students and faculty were first expelled (in the early 1960s) and later quietly but systematically discriminated against (by not allowing them to register for engineering, education, medicine, economics, etc.). Government allegiance became the litmus test for faculty and student selection, as also did ideology, for curriculum and textbooks. For example, Marxism became a required subject during the 1970s in the School of Mathematics.

This author, for example, was expelled together with hundreds of others from the Engineering School in the Spring of 1965 for active, but peaceful, dissent against government policies. Public “purification” or expulsion meetings frequently carried a special motion that the person be sent (as additional punishment) to the Military Service, to work in the UMAP (Unidades Militares de Apoyo a la Producción) forced labor camps.

The result of forty years of such educational policies is that Cuba’s current university system has produced thousands of qualified doctors, engineers and other professionals—but no leaders of national stature. It is relevant, though, that dissent still starts at the university, in spite of government control. For example, Félix Bonné, one of the four drafters of the document *La Patria es de Todos*, was among many U.H. faculty who signed a petition in 1993, and were subsequently expelled from for it. Martha B. Roque, Ricardo Bofill, Elizardo Sánchez and many other dissident leaders have also been U.H. faculty.

On the other hand, it is also true that before 1959, it was difficult for many students with scant means, or who lived far away from Havana, Santa Clara or Santiago, the provincial capitals where the existing universities functioned, to receive a university education. For, in spite of the low tuition, they had to absorb income loss (studying instead of working) and pay for room, board and textbooks. After 1959, when several university centers were created in other provinces, textbooks became free and student scholarships in

government provided housing units was free and easily available for those students who were accepted into the politically controlled university system, such situation improved significantly.

This background constitutes the basic building blocks for the understanding of the current situation (how we got there and how we may be able to move on). We need to recognize them if we are attempting to work in and for the reconstruction of the Cuban universities, with any hope of success.

NEED FOR AID TO UNIVERSITIES DURING AND AFTER TRANSITION

Health and education have been the two most widely publicized achievements of the forty years of Fidel Castro’s dictatorial regime. Maintaining them, once a transition to political and economic pluralism is achieved in Cuba, is of utmost importance. Failure to do so will contribute to justify (1) the crude existence of the present dictatorial regime and (2) its lack of will to undergo a transition to pluralism. The latter is an important consideration.

Therefore, the first need for the proposed faculty development aid project is simply to maintain the service at its present level. But better yet, such aid could easily help to upgrade and update Cuban higher education by introducing new technology (computers, labs, etc.), new teaching methods and better books, as well as updating the curriculum.

In addition, it is crucial to help *redefine* the institutional *goals of education*, from also being a political arm of the government ideology to that of strictly furnishing the knowledge that provides a better quality of life. This will change the university both qualitatively and quantitatively. Once this change is effected, anyone, regardless of political, religious or ideological views may register in any curriculum, if he or she meets the intellectual and educational requirements. It is, therefore, necessary to help faculty and staff to draft the new procedures to run the university without the current political constraints, as well as to train them in their application.

In addition, faculty also need more technical skills. They need to master how to use new technology in support of education, in research and in their daily

work. They need to master the use of new hardware and software, in conjunction with the Internet, to enhance their teaching and scholarly activities and to develop faculty relations between Cuban and foreign institutions.

Cuban faculty must also develop new organizations and publications based on professional needs and purposes instead of mainly political ones. They must learn how to use them, to support faculty development and international exchanges. Finally, they should receive also training in grantsmanship so they can seek and obtain funds for research and education, both from national and international organizations, as is now-a-days customary in any open society.

Students, as well as faculty, have long been subjected to the current political constraints that the Cuban regime imposes. The disappearance of fear, mistrust, reliance on political (rather than intellectual) merit, as means of advancement, will require some rethinking. The new rules of the game have to be clearly laid out and explained, so all can equally benefit from them. There will be some resentment from those who profit under the present rules, and are unwilling to accept the change. But this is a challenge that will have to be faced across the board, during the transition, from all corners of Cuban society.

Students, in turn, need to master the new economic opportunities that a market economy (as opposed to a statist one) offers them. They need to learn about the roles, responsibilities and activities of contractors and entrepreneurs, as opposed to those of mere employees and functionaries (which is what the Cuban universities have produced in the past 30 years). Students need to pick up how to network among themselves, with their new professional organizations, and also with international student and professional organizations. Students must learn the benefits of continuing education, via periodic short courses, professional meetings and publications—as opposed to perceiving the end of their learning cycle once they leave the university. Finally, students should also master the art of grantsmanship, to obtain funds from external sources. For, within a short period of

time, they will be also be full fledged professionals, requesting funds for research and development.

SOME PAST EXPERIENCES IN FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

This author has learned much about faculty development from the literature, but also from several very interesting first hand experiences in international education. For more details of all these projects, see Romeu (1998).

We are an alumnus of the Fulbright Program, having served as Senior Lecturer in Mexico in 1994. There we learned about the advantages and the problems involved in faculty exchanges. We also gained experience in faculty development by teaching several short, specialized statistics courses in regional institutions.

Upon our return from Mexico, we created and have since developed, the State University of New York (SUNY)-Mexico faculty and student exchange project (Romeu, 1997). Through it a dozen Mexican faculty have attended SUNY professional meetings with full scholarships and other types of support. We have also arranged the donation of many boxes of science and mathematics books to several Mexican regional institutions. And we maintain an Internet list of Mexican faculty, who remain linked and periodically exchange education information.

We have also privately developed a network of Spanish universities where we have taught specialized, short and intensive simulation courses. This has taught us the advantages and problems involved in developing privately supported faculty development work—as opposed to that which is government and internationally supported.

We have participated, with an international team of five faculty, in the development of the Masters-level curriculum in Operations Research for the University of Comahue, in Argentina. We worked entirely through the Internet, meeting only “in virtual space.” Nevertheless, the task was successfully accomplished, on time and yielding a quality product.

We have developed a novel “internship” program with the University Rómulo Gallegos, in Venezuela,

serving as education consultant in programs funded through Fundayacucho by the World Bank. This “internship” experience consists in inviting a faculty member to our university in the United States to spend several weeks working with us. The visitor learns our teaching methods and advances in technology and the way American institutions operate. The “intern” then works as “resource” in developing teaching materials in his/her native language, in exchange for room and board. And the “intern’s” institution pays for the air fare. There must be a total commitment by the inviting faculty who, in addition to mentoring, shares office and all other personal facilities with the “intern.”

We have developed extensive collaborative research programs with Mexico. As Principal Investigators, we have submitted two proposals ranked as finalists to the National Science Foundation (NSF), to conduct joint ecological research with universities in Mexico City and Guadalajara. We have also been Co-Principal Investigators in a joint proposal, submitted to the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), part of the U.S. Department of Education) in 1997, whereby four institutions in Veracruz, Mexico, two universities in Canada and three in the U.S. proposed to place several dozen Mexican, American and Canadian students for a full year across their borders to study ecological problems in one of the other two countries.

Finally, we submitted a proposal to NSF to move twenty students from SUNY to Mexico, teaching them several bilingual science and mathematics courses in SUNY and completing the sequence at the Universidad Veracruzana

SOME PRACTICAL METHODS IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

From the previous section we can extract several very important lessons in the area of international education that could be applied to a Cuban faculty development project. It would appear that many of these activities could begin now, at least from the U.S. side.

First, this author relies heavily in Email, the Internet and computers to undertake international education

work. This is not only much faster, but much less expensive. And money (or lack thereof) is one of the crucial problems we have found in our work.

A very important, component of international education is the personal commitment and mentoring relationship. This can also be done via the Internet. Cuban faculty working in the United States and elsewhere can form “partnerships” with faculty working in Cuba, and serve as mentors and personal advisors to them, giving help in the many activities discussed above.

Another important component in faculty development is faculty exchange. There are short, medium and long stages, according to the different goals and needs. For intensive courses, conference participation, seminars, etc., short exchanges are best suited; these can often be accomplished during short (Spring, Winter) breaks and vacations. Medium exchanges can be organized during the Summer periods, when longer, more effectively paced courses can be taught, field practice conducted and research contacts established. Finally, long exchanges (of a semester or more) can be used for receiving training in special topics, postgraduate (Masters or Ph.D.) degrees, collaborative research projects, etc.

Many (if not all) of these projects can be initiated and even partially conducted via the Internet and the World Wide Web. In addition, these media can be used in conjunction with mail, phone, FAX, television, CD-ROM’s, tapes and books, in Distance Learning (DL) education. DL keeps the education project content very current and makes it very accessible once the initial expenditure for DL installations are accomplished. DL provides a larger impact, making the project available to a wider and more geographically scattered audience. Finally, due to the required installation investments that make DL possible, the development of permanent links between delivering and receiving institutions are fostered.

These links, which are essential for the sustainability of any faculty exchange project, can be of different types and work at different levels:

A Project for Faculty Development in a Transitional Cuba

- First, there is, the faculty-faculty link. This is particularly easy to implement in the Cuban case, given the natural relationships between Cuban exiles, family, friends and former colleagues. It can be quickly reestablished and easily maintained via Email and FAX.
- Second, there is the university-university (or in general institution-institution) link. Many of us Cuban exiles work today in, and have many contacts with, institutions of higher learning and research, in the United States and other countries. It should be possible for some of us to raise to these institutions the importance that links with Cuba could have for Cuban development and to aid the transition.
- Third, the present Cuban government has created a strong higher education structure (Ministerio de la Educación Superior, Academia de Ciencias, Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas, etc.). In the United States, FIPSE, NSF, USAID and other similar governmental institutions exist, as they also exist in Mexico, Venezuela, Spain and other Iberoamerican countries. It is only logical to build upon them, by establishing further and stronger links that help in the restructuring of Cuban higher education.
- Fourth, student organizations in Cuba and abroad can also provide links. These can prove especially helpful in finding scholarships and providing mentorship to students and in enhancing mutual understanding of the different realities that have existed throughout these years, and in ways to effect their positive evolution.
- Fifth, professional organizations, especially Cuban-American organizations, can provide a substantially strong link. This author knows of (and belongs to) the professional associations in exile dealing with engineering, economics and education. We also know of several others, in exile and inside Cuba, who could join in this effort. In addition, American, Iberoamerican and worldwide organizations (for example the American Statistical Association, the Asociación Mexicana de Estadística and the International Statistical Insti-

tute, in our main area of expertise) can join in through the auspices of its Cuban-American members and associates.

- Finally, Cuban civil society and exiled organizations can also contribute to the effort of linking its members and institutions inside Cuba and in the Cuban diaspora. In our mind, establishing the first contacts is crucial; the rest would happen naturally and much easier.

All of these links can help obtain individual and institutional funds and other types of aid for Cuban higher education institutions, during the transition. Links can also contribute to obtain aid and funds from international organizations such as Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), who are currently providing such type of help to other Iberoamerican countries.

A CUBAN FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT PROPOSAL

Taken by themselves, all of the above are of small practical value. In order to achieve something positive, an organization that provides unified, consistent direction and purpose must be created. Such an organization would also provide the continuity to sustain the initial efforts, once the aura and spell of the first moments of a Cuban transition have passed. It would also provide the overall vision to comprehensive aid that benefits all Cuban institutions, no matter how new or how far from Havana they might be.

Such an organization would also help in avoiding effort duplication, waste, budget over-runs and needless delays. It can help in establishing contacts between Cuban faculty in the island and abroad, and between all Cubans and non-Cubans willing to cooperate in this effort. It can help in avoiding misunderstandings and in quickly redressing them, if and when they occur. It can avoid or prevent loose ends in the project. And most important, such an organization can provide follow-up and follow-through, so that a faculty development project actually fulfills the sustainable needs of all Cuban institutions of higher learning during and after a transition to pluralism in Cuba.

We think of such project organization as a sort of *Clearinghouse* that would operate, first and foremost, a central data base (DB). The DB would contain lists of all Cuban institutions of higher learning and research, of all individual faculty in the island interested in working on this project, and of those outside Cuba willing to cooperate. The Clearinghouse's first task would be to put them all in contact and help in establishing, enhancing and maintaining such initial contacts. This could be started now.

The Clearinghouse DB should also have a list of project topics and ideas that must have been thought through and developed prior to the start of the transition. Once the transition is underway, these projects can be refined and expanded, through discussions with Cuban faculty and institutions. Such projects should be comprehensive and should pursue a general development policy—rather than being a collection of patch-work ideas. Some of these projects can already be under development, at least in broad lines, when the transition starts—if we start now. We cannot afford to start thinking about the projects at the crucial time when the transition is already ongoing.

The Clearinghouse DB should also have is a list of potential donors and a preliminary operations budget. With some initial commitments from potential donors, as well as some preliminary mechanisms, this project could also start now.

There are many more functions that a Faculty Development Project requires. But the three mentioned are extremely important and also ones that ASCE, perhaps in conjunction with others and the support of some funding organization, can start working on immediately. Long-range planning requires lots of good thinking—and definitely some financial support.

DISCUSSION

Many friends and colleagues have provided input and encouragement to this work. I would like to acknowledge Uva Clavijo's comments as discussant at the ASCE session as well as Stuart Lippe's careful commentary. They form the basis for the discussion in this section. I will briefly touch on three issues: (1)

there has been an improvement in conditions inside Cuba; (2) there already exist a number of "similar" programs to the one proposed in this paper; and (3) whether this project could be started now.

It is true that, recently, the political climate has changed in Cuba. There is less indoctrination, political pressure and religious discrimination in the universities today than we suffered as students 25 years ago. But it still exists and, relaxed as it may be, the problem cannot be ignored. It is also true that today there are more contacts among Cuban and foreign faculty than before. However, it is still scarce and limited to a reduced group of faculty. And it is not always open to all those faculty interested—but to a select group of faculty members.

This author has interacted with Cuban faculty at international professional meetings and via Internet. He still finds them isolated, both scientifically and professionally, and cautious. And the use of a figure of 5 or 6 Internet messages per day as an indicator of Cuban Email transactions volume, when there are dozens of universities and research centers and thousands of faculty and researchers in Cuba, is simply not acceptable.

Actually, the strength of the project presented in this paper is, precisely, that it deals with the above problem and with the discussant's argument that similar programs already exist between Cuban and U.S. and other foreign institutions. Programs do exist that interact with—and reward—the top elements in the highly pyramidal Cuban university structure. Those are the Deans, Center Directors, etc., in today's Cuba. Under the current arrangements, when the transition occurs, these functionaries will continue to benefit from existing programs—at the expense of those who may have been slighted due to current government selection.

Our proposed project, by creating an open DB process, where anyone may be included—irrespective of ideology, rank, etc.—provides selection opportunity based on merit: equal opportunity. This, in the mind of this author, is the strongest argument in favor of this proposal.

Finally, yes, the time has come. The project should be started now.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this paper we have discussed the background to current problems and needs of Cuban universities. This topic is not only very close to us, but also one where we have had long and first hand experience. This author studied five years in the University of Havana, graduating in 1973. His mother taught there for fourteen years, before 1959 and all his siblings and both parents also graduated from the same institution many years ago.

There is an unquestionable need to help renew the Cuban institutions of higher learning, once the unavoidable transition gets started. The infrastructure among Cuban exiles to assist already exists: professional organizations, faculty members, international organization functionaries, researchers, professionals, entrepreneurs. It is just a matter of organizing such rich and varied infrastructure and using it for this worthwhile purpose.

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Finally, potential donors do exist—even if they may be difficult to find. The United States and the Iberoamerican countries are all interested in a transition in Cuba, as may also be such international organizations as the IDB, IMF and WB. However, they will only be in a position to cooperate when there is a government in Cuba they can deal with (i.e., a government willing to undertake such a transition).

However, there are some U.S. non-profit organizations that can be tapped. This author has already approached the Ford, Rockefeller, ARCA and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur foundations as well as government organizations such as the National Security Education Program (NSEP) and FIPSE. Some have already expressed an interest—even if their charters may not allow them to fund this effort. And there are always the universities and the Cuban American professional associations.

There is hope.

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